

USCIS Director Aguirre and California Governor Schwarzenegger Welcome New Citizens

SAN DIEGO - Friday, January 30, 2004

More than 200 Marines and Sailors were sworn in as U.S. citizens at a naturalization ceremony at Camp Pendleton where they were joined and congratulated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Eduardo Aguirre, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, USCIS Office of Citizenship Chief Alfonso Aguilar, and Marine Corps Major General William Bowden. In what is considered the largest all-military naturalization ceremony ever held in Southern California, these service members were granted citizenship by the very country that they defend on a daily basis. The majority of the men and women naturalized today will be deploying to Iraq and other overseas posts in the near future.

This group of service members is just a small fraction of the approximately 13,000 military personnel who have requested expedited citizenship since the enactment of President Bush's Executive Order of July 2002, which allows legal permanent residents actively serving in the U.S. military to apply for naturalization. They are immediately eligible for this benefit. Legal permanent residents who were on active duty on September 11, 2001, or after, but have since been honorably discharged from the military are also eligible for expedited naturalization.

Special guests at the ceremony, Director Aguirre and Governor Schwarzenegger, were also immigrants and became naturalized U.S. citizens in 1970 and 1984, respectively. Governor Schwarzenegger arrived in America from Austria at the age of 21, and Director Aguirre emigrated from Cuba as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 15.